

Appropriations Committee Hearing on HB 6380 - March 4, 2011

Dear Senator Harp, Senator Prague, Representative Walker, Representative Hamm, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Gigi Whitford and I am a certified Teacher of the Visually Impaired who works for BESB. I am a member of the Children's Services' Special Services Unit, the unit devoted to working with students who have multiple disabilities and/or deafblindness in addition to their visual impairment. I also serve as the Vice President of CATVI, Connecticut Association of Teachers of the Visually Impaired.

I stand before you tonight urging you to oppose HB 6380 (SB 1012).

If this bill passes, and BESB is disintegrated, the needs of our clients who have multiple disabilities and deafblindness will suffer by being administered by a Department (Department of Education) whose interests and expertise lie elsewhere.

I know from experience of BESB's dedication to the service of students who have multiple disabilities in addition to their visual impairment. I am afraid that the services the children, their families, and their teams receive will be compromised without the support of BESB's leadership and commitment and without the outstanding collaboration between the agency's divisions.

I am incredibly privileged to work with students who have multiple disabilities. Students with multiple disabilities and visual impairment are complex children with unique needs. But this is the reason they require a Teacher of the Visually Impaired backed by the support, expertise and collaboration of an agency exclusively dedicated to the interests and needs of the blind across the lifespan.


The service BESB provides through the coordinated effort of the different divisions is remarkable. Please allow me to highlight some of specific ways BESB addresses the population I work with:

- BESB's Special Services Unit provides trainings each year on topics specific to working with students with multiple disabilities and/or deafblindness. These trainings are attended by school personnel, related service providers and families. I know our trainings make a difference for our students and their teams because participants are able to go back to their classrooms and implement strategies they have learned.
- BESB has teachers in the Special Services and Preschool Units who have had additional specialized training in the area of Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI).
- BESB has teachers in the Special Services Unit who have had additional specialized training in this area of deafblindness, including one specialist in Deafblindness.

BESB is truly a model for what a strong, streamlined, collaborative State agency should be. I urge you to oppose this bill so that all of Connecticut knows that they can continue to turn to BESB

Please allow BESB to continue to meet the needs of individuals with visual impairments. Please don't support this bill. Please don't break up BESB. Please don't compromise the futures of my students.

Thank you for your kind attention and consideration.

Respectfully submitted, 
Gigi Whitford, M.A.
Certified Teacher of the Visually Impaired